

AperTO - Archivio Istituzionale Open Access dell'Università di Torino

## Chaos in a Box: the language of diasporic intertextualities in Suhayl Saadi

### This is the author's manuscript

*Original Citation:*

*Availability:*

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/140553> since

*Publisher:*

ARACNE Editrice S.r.l.

*Terms of use:*

Open Access

Anyone can freely access the full text of works made available as "Open Access". Works made available under a Creative Commons license can be used according to the terms and conditions of said license. Use of all other works requires consent of the right holder (author or publisher) if not exempted from copyright protection by the applicable law.

(Article begins on next page)

# Chaos in a Box: the language of diasporic intertextualities in Suhayl Saadi

Esterino Adami

Writing is the act of being outside. It is the  
scream of the excluded.

Suhayl Saadi, *The Burning Mirror*

Essi ritenevano che il segreto fosse grande, e  
quanto più lui giurava di non possederlo, tanto  
più erano convinti che lo possedesse, e fosse un  
segreto vero, perché se fosse stato falso lo a-  
vrebbe rivelato.

Umberto Eco, *Il pendolo di Foucault*

In 2009 Suhayl Saadi, the writer of Pakistani and Afghani origin, authored *Joseph's Box*, a novel in which chaos seems to be the governing paradigm, as it blends different historical, cultural and narrative levels, has a multilayered textual organisation and numerous references to European and Asian cultures. Saadi himself affirms in an interview that “[it] is not written to conform to the internal or macroscopic structures of the standard novel” (in Shaikh 2010: 151).

Essentially the book involves three main overlapping storylines concerned with the lives of Zuleikha Chasm Framareza MacBeth, a general practitioner from an ethnically mixed family, Archibald Enoch MacPherson, her WWII veteran terminally ill patient, and Alexander Wolfe, a lute player. In the waters of the Clyde, Zulie and Alex find a mysterious box which contains six other boxes, each tied to an obscure clue, which actually corresponds to one leg of an east-bound journey. As the quest-based movement leads from Glasgow to Argyll, Lincolnshire, Sicily, Lahore, and Baltistan, the accumulation of Zulie's and Alex's dreams, hopes, fears and anxieties, along with

Archie's distant echoes and memories, grows into a web of stories, in which the representation of chaos is employed to tackle issues such as diaspora, identity and transformation. In this paper I will apply chaos theory to Saadi's novel in order to show how the author audaciously expands the porous boundaries of diasporic writing.

The novel is deeply rooted into a plurality of styles and modes of storytelling, drawing from music, poetry, history, myths and other cultural fields, and this technique, like a challenging game of Chinese boxes, multiplies the flow of narrations. Against this multifaceted context, I argue that chaos does not represent a mere instance of Babel-like anarchy, but rather, that it encapsulates the manifestations, frictions and contradictions of cultures and traditions, as reshaped by the centripetal forces of diasporic imagination and postmodern intertextuality.

The plot of the novel seems to be set in motion by a fortuitous episode, namely Zulie's discovery of a mysterious box in the river. This apparently mundane event generates a chain of intersected stories and can be interpreted – in scientific terms – as an instance of deterministic chaos, which refers to “the context, the medium we inhabit in everyday life, ubiquitously allowing for, and indeed mandating individuality as well as unpredictability within a determined order” (Hawkins 1995: 1-2). This notion of chaos seeks to cluster the number of possibilities of what can happen in real (and fictional) worlds, and determines a concatenation and combination of events, which in turn may generate consequences and repercussions. It opens up the binary opposition of order and disorder in the attempt to consider the complexities and negotiations of cultures and societies.

According to Hayles, “at the centre of chaos theory is the discovery that hidden within the unpredictability of chaotic systems are deep structures of order” (1991: 1). Chaos theory therefore, rather than envisaging destiny as a prescribing monolithic and inscrutable power, tries to question the concatenations of events and consequences emerging from the ‘comingling’ of different situations. In this perspective, the multiple narrative progression that Saadi deftly works out, redesigns and goes beyond the notions of order and disorder, creating fresh alternatives, viewpoints and interpretations. Considering that “art's complex nonlinear systems are [...] inherently chaotic and

therefore at odds with comparatively linear critical, aesthetic, moralistic and ideological ideals of order" (Hawkins 1995: 5), the writer exploits the power of chaos *in toto* so as to give voice and visibility to migrants, women and the elderly, who may be regarded as liminal social subjects.

To achieve such an ambitious goal, Saadi illustrates chaos through the amplified mechanisms of postmodern intertextuality, which not only reproduce the unstable condition of the contemporary age, but also capture the uncertainty of the "migrant condition". In Saadi, intertextuality can be seen as a key strategy that permits the interspersing of different social, historical and cultural levels, combining the remaking of nationhood in the light of Scottishness and migrancy, the colonial history of Britain, the ancient customs of Arabo-Persian and Asian civilisations, as well as other references. Indeed, intertextuality can be seen as a "term which continually refers to the impossibility of singularity, unity, and thus unquestionably authority" (Allen 2000: 209), and the writer adopts this tool so as to affirm the power of multiplicity within and through various cultures, languages and traditions.

With regard to the extensive literary production of the author, and to *Joseph's Box* in particular, Stotesbury affirms that "his narrative blends and 'translates' (or hybridises) mythologies and cultures, both ancient and utterly contemporary" (2010a: 90), and, as such, it shapes the mimetic processes that extensively draw on the productive sites of postcolonial and postmodern chaos. Language, thus, constructs both in the text and in the reader's perception the overwhelming accumulation of references and symbols through which cultures influence each other.

Given the textual richness of *Joseph's Box*, it is important to take into account the novel's spatial deixis, in particular the places evoked and reconstructed through the eyes of Zulie and Alex as novel wayfarers who cross geographical, cultural and mental borders to solve the enigma of the boxes. Their quest represents an act of unearthing the past and its copious cultural and historical stratifications, with their echoes of both the dimension of myth and the postcolonial heritage. The first locations that the two protagonists visit in the UK (Glasgow, Argyll and Lincoln) appear to be imaginary "stations" along a perilous pilgrimage and are portrayed as subterranean worlds belonging to a

decayed past and emerging from the accretion of detritus, memories and relics.

Consequently, Zuleikha and Alex's descent into the labyrinths of the underworld acquires mythical value as a rite of passage towards other places, other states of consciousness and perception. The two characters want to decrypt the various clues of the boxes they find, but in doing so not only do they challenge a mystery, but they also question themselves, as well as their past and present experiences. In the framework of chaos theory, the notion of myth can be seen as a fundamental interpretative category, and is reminiscent of the fact that "while myth may be paradigmatic, and while it may imply a given social and cosmic order, or perfection, it also carries with it a promise of another mode of existence entirely, a possible way of being just beyond the present time and place" (Coupe 2009: 9). By stepping into an indefinite "elsewhere", the protagonists unconsciously decide to reshape their identities and search for a new direction in their lives. Chaos emerges as a "creative necessity" (Hawkins 1995: 4), an urge to go through knowledge and understanding, which also functions through the Pantagruelian style of the author who builds up a huge wealth of interfusing symbols, traditions and stories.

After leaving Britain, the two protagonists head for Palermo and subsequently Lahore. The two cities are portrayed as "postcolonial places", in which the chaotic signs of the past – palaces, churches, mosques, havelis – mingle together and constitute a reluctant transition towards uncertain (post) modernity (Adami 2012a). In both locations, for Alex and Zuleikha dilapidated buildings are mute and seductive witnesses of complex and ancient cultures through time and space. For the woman, Palermo is a Mediterranean city that builds up its identity by compressing histories and stories. Here, although the old buildings of the city centre are rundown and crumbling, they jealously keep secrets and meanings, transforming names, words, and traditions:

The word *medina* meant simply the centre of a town. Palermo's centre was a medina, since it had once been an Arab city, Bal'harm. In fact, Zuleikha had read that in those days, Palermo had been known as simply Al-madina: *the City*. La Kalsa, Al-Aziz, Piazzetta Garraffo, Seralcadio, Lat-

tarini... there were so many Arabo-Muslim names for neighbourhoods for rock and stone and glass, for rivers, mountains, fields, food. (Saadi 2009: 356; author's emphasis)

In reality, here, the semantic density of words – such as Medina, which is both a toponym and an anthroponym in several Arab-influenced countries, from Malta to Somalia – suggests the perseverance of history at work, of a decadent atmosphere, in which the memory of origins is sketched onto both the chaotic architectural plans and the linguistic and philological heritage.

The postcolonial nature and connotations of Lahore come forward even more clearly – considering its importance and prestige during the Raj – and climax into the contradictions of the contemporary city, which for Zuleikha was:

[...] positively hallucinatory. It was as though time had become quantum, so that the highest technology – a Pakistani had invented the world's first computer virus, for which Zuleikha thought he ought to have received an anti-matter Nobel Prize – coexisted with the severest levels of serfdom and under-development imaginable. (Saadi 2009: 470)

In the novel, the city, with its eclectic architecture, “a style known as ‘Mughal-Gothic’ that, like much fusion music, seemed to be out of place everywhere” (Saadi 2009: 468), entwines its colonial inheritance with a sense of ambiguity and, intertextually, grows as an imagined place. Through the chaotic sedimentation of its legacy, it bespeaks of the colonial past set against the approximate sense of our current modernity. The labyrinthine central area that Zuleikha and Alex reach during their quest is a ‘repository’ of colonial and postcolonial memory inscribed in stone, in which the sense of multiplicity extensively surfaces. Pakistan is also known as “the land of the Pure”, but in celebrating the energizing chaos of ‘postcolonial cities’, Saadi seems to echo Rushdie and his warning about the “absolutism of the Pure” (1991: 394) inasmuch as intercultural hybridity represents a possibility of metamorphosis, of expanding ‘otherness’ or combining styles and perceptions, which eventually erupts into novelty and contamination.

Saadi's experimental writing is grounded on a variety of codes, languages and references, and in *Joseph's Box* linguistic and cultural

hybridity results in the recourse to a hyperbolic style in both listing and appositional constructions that often amplify the lexical clusters of the text. Verbal communication is expressed through a mix of both standard and non-standard languages, enhanced by loanwords and expressions from other languages and dialects, such as Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Hindustani, Scottish Gaelic and even Italian and Sicilian, which lead to a wide-ranging linguistic density. As a whole, however, since the novel is written mainly in intradiegetic mode, multilingual effects are not typically achieved by the technique of code-switching in the characters' dialogues, but rather through evocative descriptions (Talib 2002: 137) touching on several domains including religion, society, history, which foreground the semantic dimension of the text and its ramifications into other genres, for example poetry, ghazals, songs and legends.

Saadi's rhizomatic multilingualism is part of his idiosyncratic style, as it was in his previous fiction. The stories collected in *The Burning Mirror* (2001), for example, try to represent the diastratic and diatopic varieties of English used in Scotland, sometimes with the marking of unusual spelling or other iconic devices in order to show the power of language to represent identity in local contexts. In the case of the stylistically pyrotechnical novel *Psychoraag* (2004), borrowings and lexical items from Urdu and other western/eastern languages are so copious that a glossary was included in the book. These linguistic choices encode a range of particular implications (such as social belonging or ethnic origins) and serve to shape a rich and hybrid context. In pragmatic terms, the interlocking of voices and echoes also expands the construction of the narrative world because with this strategy "the effect is to remind the reader of other people, other worlds, other ways of looking at life" (Black 2006: 50).

Thus, the author's heteroglossia, on the one hand, tries to represent cultural chaos as a positive site of linkages, interconnections and interdependences, and on the other it also operates on an intertextual level because, according to Stotesbury (2010a: 97), "mixing linguistic codes, deploying dialect and alien tongue strategically in a narrative, can work powerfully to challenge the literary preconceptions of any reader willing to participate in the cultural dialogue". Therefore, from a cognitive point of view the narrative collage of the author strength-

ens the communicative dimension of the text and consequently engages the reader with postcolonial and postmodern stories which focus on identities, crises and transformations. Approaching the different echoing stratifications of the novel, therefore, constitutes a challenge because the reader has to retrieve and reorganise schemata; that is, the mental structures by which “we package world knowledge and use this in the interpretation of texts” (Jeffries and McIntyre 2010: 126). In broad terms we may consider the development of *Joseph’s Box* as a kind of conceptual metaphor describing a real/metaphorical journey as a reflection of the various experiences that make up the concept of life and all its articulations. Furthermore the presence of untranslated words from various languages reinforces the structural complexity of the novel because “refusing to translate words not only registers a sense of cultural distinctiveness but also forces the reader into an active engagement with a vernacular culture” (Ashcroft 2009: 176). By adopting a defamiliarising technique, Saadi thus encourages the reader to identify and respond to a system of analogies and links in the different cultural contexts, depicted and built up in his fiction.

The novelist’s textual resources also include a particular type of non-verbal communication, namely music, which functions as a kind of universal language that connects different epochs, traditions, and locations. After Alex and Zuleikha tell each other about their own condition of widowhood, the man plays his lute and his performance constitutes a type of epiphany. “Then he began to play. It was quite unlike any music Zuleikha had ever heard. [...] He was using every part of himself to bring this instrument to life. He was creating music” (Saadi 2009: 149). For Alex, playing the lute permits to utter messages that otherwise would be downgraded in verbal communication and, thus, in the book, music in its various “chaotic” forms as diverse as “Madrigals, motets, arias and the rest” (Saadi 2009: 170) has an important role in the connective tissue by linking references and styles. Every time Alex approaches one of the places indicated in the mysterious boxes, he feels the urge to use his instrument as a device to understand the surrounding context, and its cultural and metaphysical gist. In the wilds of Lincolnshire, for example, Alex perceives the transformation of his own music as a mutable code giving order to what seems to be imprecise chaos:



The nature of the music which he was able to produce on such an instrument also had altered – the tunings were all different and it was simply impossible to play polyphony on this simpler form of the lute – and so the structure had dictated that the melodic line become dominant and he found himself embroidering loose texts around that line. [...] Yet the playing – his playing – was not loose; in fact he had never played so well in his life. (Saadi 2009: 237)

Music as an art (or science) is strictly regulated by mathematical proportions, but Saadi seems to reverse its main structures and proposes non-canonical, ethereal perspectives. Indeed, the central position attributed to music is not a new device for the novelist since one of the narrating characters of *Psychoraag*, Zaaf, is a Glasgow-based DJ of Asian origins who seeks to “construct an aural ‘raag’ (a pattern of notes used to convey particular emotions, blended with the performer’s own personality) made up of both music and Englishes” (Stotesbury 2010a: 101). Music, moreover, does not refer exclusively to classic or sophisticated genres, but it also represents the vigour of modern rock and roll and other alternative styles, as in the case of Laila, who used to be a hippie enthusiast. If we take the view that music is a form of language, then we can see how polyphony, a key term which, here, may be close to the plural value of postmodern and post-colonial chaos, works as a strategy for meaning-making, for mixing and elaborating songs, voices and intertextualities galore.

Additionally, on a pure linguistic level, the writer seems to manipulate lexical constructions drawn from different languages, so as to achieve euphonic and echoing renditions. In particular this is achieved by elaborating certain phonological effects in the repeated combination of specific words, phrases and structures. As highlighted by Ganapathy-Doré (2011: 152), for the postcolonial Indian writer “the English language becomes a musical instrument”, a trait which is evident in Saadi’s exuberant fiction as well; in particular in the assonantal and rhyming effects of some parts of the text arising from the linguistic blend that marks the idiolect of some characters.

However, at the centre of the linguistic and stylistic medley that reverberates throughout *Joseph’s Box* it is also possible to identify some mysterious messages, maps, and scrolls that come with the boxes: these constitute a real bonanza of hybrid, uncanny idioms that seem to

allow communication in a different, almost “esoteric” fashion. When the two wanderers decipher the clue underneath a chapel in Argyll, for example, they discover elements of an arcane alphabet:

It looked like Arabic, or Hebrew, but it might just as well have been ancient Aramaic or Assyrian for all Alex knew. The shapes of the letters, while recognisably Latinate, yet had that angular, Middle Eastern look about them, a certain ambience of ziggurats and almond eyes. Strange slashes and dots. Each tiny mark would totally change the sound, the meaning. (Saadi 2009: 216)

If in this and several other passages, apparently, the structure of the novel seems to follow the rules of a puzzle narrative, the author’s aim is much more ambitious since the “bulimic” interplay of different codes, symbols, and icons eventually represents an imagined archive of memories, stories, experiences revolving around the human condition, which are locked in the wooden boxes. The novel’s multi-voiced style thus articulates the progress of Zuleikha and Alex and engenders the fusion of time, space and identity, a powerful process of transformation which Saadi himself, in a recent interview (see Adami 2012b), describes as a typical feature of his creative syncretic writing.

It is perhaps too tempting to mention the myth of Pandora’s box, which is explicitly cited in the novel a few times: the woman, created out of clay by Hephaestus at Zeus’ order, carried a jar containing all the illnesses of the world, and it comes naturally to compare her with Zuleikha, but the author also evokes her as a symbol of postcolonial chaos since “Pakistan was like Pandora. No-one considered that someone had stuffed evil into the box in the first place” (Saadi 2009: 595). Unlike the classical myth, however, the magical boxes in Saadi’s work are brimful of lives and energy, and when they are unlocked, they free a flow of stories, legends and memories as they activate a narrative mechanism in a sort of Scheherazade syndrome. They are also associated with elements of Sufi mysticism (Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani 1991; Lewisohn 2001), including the seven stations of sacrifice, truth, power, obedience, life, memory, and beauty, and it is worth remembering that Sufi references are also present in *Psychoraag*. At first, Zuleikha is puzzled by the eerie messages that stem from the boxes and thinks about,

a practical joke played by some quack mathematician, a message in a bottle that meant nothing at all, but was simply a maze, a puzzle, existing for its own sake or else for the purpose of bamboozling fools like them who might have had the audacity and the madness to pluck it from the river. (Saadi 2009: 149)

But she also imagines where the box would be carried if she had not recovered it from the river, so that maybe after “a thousand and one nights, the box would sail, till at length it would reach the seven mouths of the Sindh Darya” (Saadi 2009: 150).

The secret of the boxes actually concerns the capacity to experience and intermix reality and fantasy, to travel across time and space and ultimately understand the alchemy of life, in its two opposing poles: love and death. Zulie and Alex indeed fluctuate between the two: they fall in love with each other little by little, but they are also weighted down by the burden of death. He cannot forget the suicide of his wife Susan, whereas Zuleikha still bemoans the loss of her only child Daoud (David), and will see the slow physical and mental decay of Archibald MacPherson. The many religious, mythical and mystic traditions on which the novel is based envisage chaos as a sense of transformation, of being and changing, a trait common to many cultures. As Hawkins points out, “chaos theory enables us to think of artistic and intellectual expressions as a dynamic continuum allowing for differing degrees of complexities, variation, recursions, unpredictabilities and irregularities” (1995: 75). In other words, for Saadi “chaos in a box” constitutes a framing device for the representation of events and actions, embodying a range of meanings, cultural values and attitudes. Thus it reveals the possibility of creating an all-embracing palimpsest onto which great narratives, epics, anecdotes, epigrams, poems, spanning from the Indian *Mahabharata* to the Persian *Shahnameh* and other narrative traditions, are projected, evoked or revived. It also points to the capacity of the various gifted storytellers, such as Zuleikha, Alexander, Archie, Laila, and Peppe, to forge words and meanings, to ambitiously mirror life in all its aspects beyond boundaries and constraints.

However, the content that springs out of the boxes also metaphorically evokes the meaning of contemporary migrancy: stories and

words are like people who travel, migrate, move and blend in diasporic flows. As a consequence, the practice of storytelling is also concerned with the expression and manifestation of the identity of those subjects who go across borders and redefine themselves. At the same time, storytelling appears to be a tool for resisting the processes of levelling the sense of belonging and emplacement. In discussing his many-sided writing with Ziauddin Sardar (2008: 78), the novelist coins the concept of “existential heteroglossia”, which encompasses “elements of Asian-ness, European-ness, British-ness, Scottish-ness, Muslim-ness, Pakistani-ness, Afghani-ness, Indian-ness, middle-class-ness, left-wing-ness, artists-ness, physician-ness, twenty-first-century-ness”. The catalogue of identity, therefore, seems to be defined by a series of various and interconnected, sometimes even contradictory, feelings of being and belonging which, rather than represent a mere outburst of disorder, embody multiple selves. In allegorical terms, thus, the author seems to illustrate postcolonial and postmodern identity through the magical boxes seen as containers of intertextual elements, ahistorically co-existing in non-linear chains.

Saadi himself is an example of such multifaceted identity, being a novelist from an Asian background, born in Yorkshire but based in Scotland, who now works as a general practitioner, thus engaging with a variety of social, cultural and identitarian discourses, which also impact on the narrative level. Likewise, in the literary context, Zuleikha is aware of her own hybrid identity (Stotesbury 2010b), as the offspring of different cultural encounters and contacts: “Well, she thought, I too am a product of those routes, of that history and its demise. I am living proof of a changing breeze, of Sterling silver stamped with Urdu letters” (Saadi 2009: 462). To a certain extent the notion of mixed ethnic and cultural backgrounds is valid for other characters as well, for example Laila Sciacca, “being Jewish and Sicilian” (Saadi 2009: 293).

Diaspora represents a site of negotiations and hybridisations, and as such it refers to a condition of evolution and uncertainty that is somehow similar to what Bauman (2000) defines “liquid modernity”, namely a state dominated by anxieties, hesitations, and doubts. Indeed, the contemporary age is marked by the sense of transformation and innovation in various contexts and domains that impacts on rela-

tions, languages, and social practices. In his analysis of UK-based South Asian communities, Ziauddin Sardar highlights that “cultural boundaries have become fluid, shift constantly, mix and remix to produce new hybrids and synthesis” (2008: 348) and the positive chaotic combination of cultural resources concerns the dimensions of both migrancy and postmodernity, regenerating the inner sense of identity. From this angle, Zuleikha and Alexander can be seen as ‘nomads’ journeying through geographical contexts, but also emotional landscapes and, in their real and imaginary peregrinations, they question the meaning of life and its positioning. Their hectic existences are simultaneously full of hopes and memories, and drained of affections and certainties, and this inner contradictory tension represents the schizophrenic dynamics of postmodern life and identity through which individuals tend to split from space and time. Such anxiety, oscillating between two opposite poles, can be regarded as an essential feature of today’s human condition according to Anthony Giddens, since “many of the phenomena often labelled as postmodern actually concern the experience of living in a world in which presence and absence mingle in historically novel ways” (1990: 177). In this light, order in chaos regulates a balance between the different forces at work and provides new insights into the meanings of life.

The stories, folktales and legends that obsessively interface with the ramifications of the main storyline do not have a mere aesthetic function; on the contrary they demonstrate how postcolonial fantasy can galvanise the terrain of fiction, following Rushdie’s idea that “the novel can eat everything” (2011). The last section, which is set on the frozen peaks of Baltistan, for example, gradually dissolves into an overwhelming apotheosis of visions and dreams, close to transcendental practices or even drug-induced, lysergic experiences. The section displays echoes of magical realism, and is increasingly transmuted into a pure phantasmagoria wherein Zuleikha can see “the faces of the dead, of those who had died and of those who had yet to die, and even of those who had not yet been born, or who would never be born, even unto the very end of time” (Saadi 2009: 661), but this bizarre metamorphosis of shapes and sensations is a literary device that permits to reach unity through multiplicity:

it were as though she, Zuleikha Chashm Framareza MacBeth, had never been just a single isolated entity, but had been composed of a myriad of spirits, the spirits of the blades of grass, the branches of trees, [...] the spirits of numerous strangers in a thousand cities. The dead were the living and the living were the dead. And then she began to see faces she did recognise. She saw the faces of the grandparents she had barely known, those of her mother and son, of Nasrin Zeinab and dear sweet Daoud, of Archibald McPherson as a young man, of Alexander Wolfe, Susan Wolfe, Petrus Dihdo Labokla and Laila Sciacca Asunsi, of Zulfikar Losang and Peppe Ayala and of her father, Daniel John, Danyal Yahya... (Saadi 2009: 661)

It is a way to come full circle with the myth of Pandora, and many others pertaining to both western and eastern traditions, to reconcile the beginning and the end of life, to reconstruct one's own pathway of existence, as the text – in a postmodern manner – progressively deteriorates and is eventually fragmented into mystical revelations for the protagonists.

When secrets are given visibility and are finally exposed, however, they lose their mysterious fascination, as Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* (1989) has shown, and this case is no exception. The seemingly absurd sense of "chaos-scape" that eventually emerges from Saadi's innovative text concerns the balance between wholeness and fragmentation, the attempt to come to terms with both reality and fantasy as expressed via narrative modes:

And in the river, in the midst of darkness and loss, Alexander and Zuleikha had found each other, had found love, and through its stories had found life. They had merged with its stories and with all those vanished souls through whose lives it had passed, the spirits it had transmuted into words, so that in this sense Zuleikha and Alexander had themselves become words upon the river's flow. (Saadi 2009: 669-70)

It is through the blending of different cultural and linguistic layers that the textual organisation of the novel operates and encourages the reader's mechanisms of perception to piece together the various narrative structures. In this perspective words are the tools for expressing and evoking the power of creative chaos, for shaping stories and highlighting lives and identities, to overcome strict restraints and convey the single and the multiple because ultimately names, people, tradi-

tions and narrations originate from common roots and turn full circle: "And the word was Joseph, Giuseppe, Yusuf" (Saadi 2009: 321).

## References

- Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (1991) *A Dictionary of Sufi Technical Terms*, London: Octagon Press.
- Adami, E. (2012a) "The Shapes of Melancholy in the Postcolonial City: Orientalist Reminiscences or Postmodern Anxieties?," in S. Sinha (ed.) *Modern Literary Theory. New Perspectives*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 61-76.
- Adami, E. (2012b) "Writing Identity: an e-interview with Suhayl Saadi," in E. Adami and A. Martelli (eds) *Within and Across: Language and Construction of Shifting Identities in Post-colonial Texts*, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso.
- Allen, G. (2000) *Intertextuality*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Ashcroft, B. (2009) *Caliban's Voice*, London: Routledge.
- Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Black, E. (2006) *Pragmatic Stylistics*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Coupe, L. (1997) *Myth*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Eco, U. (1988) *Il pendolo di Foucault*, Milan: Bompiani.
- Eco, U. (1989) *Foucault's Pendulum*, trans. W. Weaver, San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Ganapathy-Doré, G. (2009) *The Postcolonial Indian Novel in English*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Hayles, N.K., ed. (1991) *Chaos and Order. Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

- Hawkins, H. (1995) *Strange Attractors. Literature, Culture and Chaos Theory*, Prentice Hemel Hempstead: Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Jeffries, L. and D. McIntyre (2010) *Stylistics*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Lewisohn, L. (2001) *The Wisdom of Sufism*, Oneworld: Oxford.
- Rushdie, S. (1990) *Imaginary Homelands*, Granta Books: London.
- Rushdie, S. (2011) Speech for the presentation of the Italian edition of *Luqa and the Fire of Life*, Turin, 30<sup>th</sup> May, Teatro Carignano.
- Sardar, Z. (2008) *Balti Britain*, Granta: London.
- Stotesbury, J.A. (2010a) "Language and Identity in the Narration of Suhayl Saadi's Glasgow Fiction," in M. Georgieva and A. James (eds) *Globalization in English Studies*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 89-104.
- Stotesbury, J.A. (2010b) "Death in Glasgow (and Elsewhere): Unlocking Suhayl Saadi's *Joseph's Box*". Paper presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> ESSE Conference, Turin, 24-28 August.
- Saadi, S. (2001) *The Burning Mirror*, Edinburgh: Polygon.
- Saadi, S. (2004) *Psychoraag*, Edinburgh: Chroma.
- Saadi, S. (2009) *Joseph's Box*, Ullapool: Two Ravens Press.
- Shaikh, F. (2010) "An Interview with Suhayl Saadi", in F. Shaikh (ed.) *Happy Birthday to Me. A Collection of Contemporary Asian Writing*, Leicester: Dahlia Publishing, 148-154.
- Talib, I.S. (2002) *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures*, London: Routledge.